

EO on medicine price cap signed by GMA

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

"The President held to her word that if there are drugs (in the list) that will not be reduced voluntarily, they would be subjected to MDRP," he claimed in an interview.

The medicine placed under compulsory price reduction un-

der the Executive Order were anti-hypertensive Amlodipine; anti-cholesterol Atorvastatin; anti-bacterial/anti-biotic Azithromycin; anti-neoplastic/anti-cancer Cyclophosphamide; anti-neoplastic/anti-cancer Doxorubicin and all its salt form.

The price cut shall commence on Aug. 15 while the full implementation would be on Sept. 15, and will apply to all retail outlets such as drugstores, hospital pharmacies, health maintenance organizations, convenience stores and supermarkets.

The EO would also apply to all government entities involved in the procurement of the listed drugs as well as the government corporations that reimburse the cost

of the said drugs purchased by qualified members.

Last month, the DOH-DTI submitted to President Arroyo a draft order containing the list of 21 drugs recommended for coverage by MDRP.

The President, DOH Secretary Francisco Duque III and DTI Secretary Peter Favila reportedly met with pharmaceutical firms on July 4, during which the latter offered to voluntarily cut their prices. This resulted to the price reduction of 16 drugs.

Under the order, the costs of 22 other medicine not included in the list have also been lowered.

So said the DOH which would evaluate the impact of "initiatives to bring down the prices of medicine."

"The MDRP is there for us to rely on if the pharmaceutical industry will not work with us or if they will not give us fair prices. If there is an obvious market failure or if we get no support from them, we can use the MDRP - only when needed," he added.

But So said that MDRP is only a "reserve instrument" by the government in making quality medicine affordable and accessible for Filipinos.

"We won't abuse any discretion. We'll use it only (as) a last resort. It's there and it can be used," he maintained.

PHAP pushes for 'free market'

After failing to comply with the Cheaper Medicine Law (CML), the Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP) said that its members would "abide by the law and the guidelines set out in the Executive Order and that they have started working with the government for the smooth implementation of price cuts."

"However, PHAP regrets that price control for certain medicine has been imposed since it believes that the same result could be achieved through free market competition," PHAP said in a statement.

The group said that there are already 20 amlodipine in the market whose prices are lower than the most popular brand.

"Free market competition will also in-

crease the competitiveness of the Philippines as an investment priority area for companies in various industries," PHAP said, adding that market competition would also ensure that new medicine would be introduced in the country "since the Philippines has been one of the countries in Asia where new drugs are launched after regulatory approval in the United States and in Europe."

"PHAP asserts that price control may deliver some short-term benefits but the long-term negative consequences not only on the pharmaceutical industry but in other industries must be considered. If price adjustments do not result in market expansion, then affected companies will have to study options to remain viable," PHAP added.

'Blame it on Mar'

Meanwhile, the original author of Republic Act 9502 yesterday sought to amend the watered-down law by putting back the drug price regulatory board that will put a cap on all types of medicine.

Iloilo Rep. Ferjanel Biron believes that Republic Act 9502, or the Universally Accessible Cheaper and Quality Medicine Act of 2008, can still be amended, for purposes of bringing down further the prices of drugs.

Mrs. Arroyo declared during her SONA that she "supported the tough House version of the Cheaper Medicine Law," referring to the regulatory board.

"I supported it over the weak version of my critics," she said, referring to Sen. Mar Roxas.

By "weak version," the President meant the parallel importation or deregulated drug industry espoused by Roxas, but which she signed into law.

Biron - a doctor by profession - said he filed the amendment because he is hopeful that the drug price regulatory board would be reinstated by way of an amendment.

He said Mrs. Arroyo only wants to "give credit where credit is due" when she thanked him for the bill.

"Roxas is never the original advocate for cheaper medicine," Biron said, blaming the senator for removing the drug price regulatory board in the original House version.

It was Roxas who said that the lowering of drug prices should be the sole discretion of the President, upon the recommendation of the health secretary.

Iloilo Vice Gov. Rokes Suplico, Biron's co-author, said the President was just "being honest."

"She is not Congress, nor is she a member of Congress. Roxas killed the Cheaper Medicine Act by surgically removing the mandatory drug price regulation. Thus, from compulsory, the law became merely discretionary," Suplico said.

"Mar should be blamed for this act of betrayal. He should help to amend this. We should blame Mar for the continued exorbitant drug prices in the country today. Mar abolished mandatory price regulation and the Drug Price Regulatory Board during the law's deliberation in the bicameral conference," Suplico, a former Iloilo congressman, said.

With Marvin Sy, Delon Porcalla, Elisa Osorio